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THE BIRD-STORE MAN



AN
OLD-FASHIONED
STORY

NORMAN DUNCAN





THE BIRD-STORE MAN

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The Bird-Store Man

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"Were you talking to them?" she demanded

THE

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An Old-Fashioned Story

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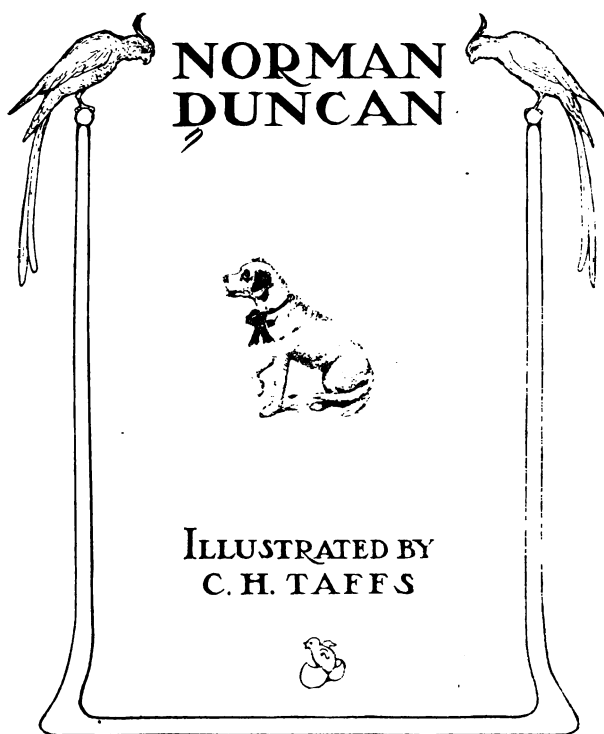
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THE BIRD~STORE MAN

AN OLD-FASHIONED STORY



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Peace
to the ashes of
MOHO and POODLES
who
were overtaken by
misfortune

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I

Home Again



R. THOMAS TWITTER slapped the door shut on a saucy gust of wind with the triumphant air of having excluded every variety of woe and aggravation with the flakes and wintry draught. It was a cold night. It blew high. A dust of snow was in the gale. There was aggravation enough in the frosty darkness for Mr. Twitter's bones ; and there was woe enough for Mr. Twitter's spirit in the sullen cross-currents of work-people going past in the bitter obscurity. But having closed the door, with a swift and victorious bang, Mr. Twitter hopped around, cocked his head, and perked about his little shop, in glances of the sharpest, from the floor to the ceiling and all over the walls, with a

The Bird-Store Man

shining smile of satisfaction. He twittered—that is to say, he chuckled; and he snatched off his cap, and stamped his feet, and rubbed his hands, and began to turn a jovial rosy colour. He cried blithely: “Hello there, all you little folks!” And: “Ah-ha, ye rascals!” And: “How-dy do!” Then he slipped off his greatcoat, quick as a flash, and trimmed the lights, and dashed at the scowling stove and gave it a furious shaking: whereupon the little shop, which had been gloomy and silent in the absence of the singular proprietor, glowed with light and warmth and awoke to vociferous jubilation.

II

The Singular Behaviour of Tom Twitter



MR. TWITTER was a spare old fellow, with a lean, shaven face, furnished with pleasantly snapping gray eyes, fun-loving lips, much used to pursing, and a long agreeably curved nose, like a beak of engaging proportions. He was jaunty and rosy and nimble; and he sparkled with genial friendliness from his flashing bald pate to the polished tips of his toes. His eyes twinkled, his face shone, his rounded waistcoat expressed its satisfaction, his legs were of a humorous cut and habit. Never before, indeed, was a man fashioned so nearly in the image of a bird. Mr. Twitter was jerky of manner, chirpy of voice, and given, in gait, to something resembling a

The Bird-Store Man

hop, but not quite exactly ; his head was forever on one side, as if one eye, keenly and diligently employed, were quite sufficient to discover all that he needed to know ; his neck was long and lean, his legs long and lean ; his waistcoat was brilliantly feathered—tinted, to be precise ; and over his tight breeches and bright waistcoat he wore a dark cutaway coat, with stiff tails, like the folded wings of a robin. Perched on a rail fence, at a reasonable distance in hazy fall weather, with his head cocked and his nose defined against the sky, Mr. Twitter might easily have been mistaken for a mammoth robin by almost anybody.

In age Mr. Twitter was a baffling challenge to speculation. His eyes were anywhere from four to forty, depending upon the age, quality, wisdom and frivolous or decrepit behaviour of his company. They might be as limpid and guileless as four (if his company chanced to be of that limpid and guileless age) ; they might be as merry and impudent as fourteen ; they might be

Singular Behaviour

as shrewd, as indignant, as masterful as forty-eight; they might be as tired and faded and absent as four-and-eighty. His pate was sixty at least. The set of his shoulders—the thrust of his chest—was thirty or thereabouts. His glance?—a fine, defiant, hopeful, humorous twenty-one, and not a day older! His legs were a frolicsome sixteen, his waistcoat a comfortable forty-two, his laugh as lightsome as twelve. To discover the average of all these bewildering factors, and thereby approximately to arrive at the date of Mr. Twitter's birth, the most highly ingenious exercise of the very deepest mathematical profundity is required, involving much more than addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, both long and short. When the computation is performed with scrupulous exactitude it results in this surprising disclosure: that Mr. Twitter was neither as old as he might have been nor as young as he used to be. And the answer is correct.

Standing presently in the middle of the

The Bird-Store Man

floor, his long legs spread wide, his hands deep down in his breeches pockets, his head cocked once more, his ears wide open, his eyes twinkling, his brows lifted so high in delighted expectation that each described a tall isosceles triangle, Mr. Twitter cried again: "Ah-ha, ye little scallawags! Glad t' see the old gentleman? Eh? Everybody hungry?" And he went "*Tweet, tweet!*" with ingratiating sweetness, as if addressing a canary with fluency and the most intimate familiarity in its own language; and he whistled "*Whee, whee, whee, whee!*" with furious authority, as if summoning a willful old dog to his heels. And in spite of these loud and happy salutations there was not a soul in the shop. Not a soul! But had such a shocking assertion confronted Mr. Twitter he would instantly have demolished it—with argument, with contempt, with ridicule; and all quite to his own satisfaction. Not a soul in the shop? Preposterous!—Mr. Twitter might have snorted. Not a soul? Ha! There were

Singular Behaviour

souls on the shelves, souls under the counters, souls in the shop windows, souls suspended from the ceiling. Not a soul? Bosh! Mr. Twitter fancied he had kept *that* little shop long enough to know what he was talking about!

There he stood, at any rate, alone and expectant in the middle of the floor, exquisitely delighted, going "*Tweet?*" and "*Tweet, tweet!*"—and trilling and warbling away—as if absorbed in amiable conversation.

"*Tweet?*" inquired Mr. Twitter, archly.

"*Tweet, tweet, tweet!*" was the reply.

"*Tweet, tweet!*" Mr. Twitter expostulated.

Whatever this last communication amounted to—and there is of course no means of telling—it evoked a storm of twitters and chirps in remonstrance.

"*Tweet!*" Mr. Twitter was compelled to agree.

In short, Mr. Twitter was the keeper of a bird-store and animal-shop; and if he were not on conversational terms with

The Bird-Store Man

every friendly bird and beast therein domiciled he was either a rogue of vast pretensions or an old fellow devoted overmuch to tomfoolery in his idle moments. Whether he was a rogue of vast pretensions, or an old fellow devoted overmuch to tomfoolery in his idle moments, or neither the one nor the other, you shall presently learn for yourself. Mr. Twitter went straight on talking to the canaries; and the canaries, obviously interested and delighted, went straight on talking to Mr. Twitter.

III

An Institution of Learning



EXCEPT for a slight list to starboard, and a rakish little tilt to the roof, and an air of defiant old-fashion, Mr. Twitter's establishment was outwardly correct in every particular. It was a little old building of white frame, two-storied, with something additional in the way of a high-angled garret. It had wide shop-windows below, lifted somewhat above the pavement and flanking a broad black door with a brass knocker and fluted white columns; and it had a row of green-shuttered windows above, coming close to the eaves, and frankly thrown back, as if the apartment beyond had nothing in the wide world to conceal. Running the width of the shop, over the windows

The Bird-Store Man

and door, was the legend: THOMAS TWITTER. It indicated merely that one Thomas Twitter did business within; it revealed nothing whatsoever of the twinkling and loquacious delight Tom Twitter had in doing business, nor even hinted at the amazingly novel delight the merest chance-passenger might gain by dropping in and doing business in a friendly fashion with Tom Twitter. Something more was communicated by an obscure little sign over the door: TWITTER ACADEMY. But concerning the sort and worth of the learning imparted within no information was betrayed; the toothsome little mystery remained discreet and inviting: TWITTER ACADEMY—and not another word.

Tom Twitter's astonishing argument with the canaries, which he had now pertinaciously renewed, was interrupted by the shy arrival of a customer from the windy night. The door opened. A blast of snowy wind leaped in; but a soft closing of the door—a polite and solicitous

An Institution of Learning

closing—shut out the eager, frosty crowd of gusts behind. And there stood the Little Girl : a dear, dark little creature, of an elderly gravity, with a shawl over her head, and a lively bundle, snugly wrapped in a corner, held close and anxiously in her warm arms. She was not such a patron as Tom Twitter was used to receiving : there was no equipage outside—there was no maid, there was no footman. The Little Girl was lowly and alone. Tom Twitter turned, without for an instant remitting his contention with the birds ; and having discovered the Little Girl's shy waiting, and having divined her errand, and having been saddened a little, perhaps, by her delicate loveliness, dwelling perilously in the inimical tenement world, he proceeded to deal with her precisely as if she had been of exalted station, practicing his tricks all the more willingly, no doubt, because she was not. That is to say, he smiled, he performed a charming bow, he smiled once more, with his head on one side and his eyes twin-

The Bird-Store Man

klings; and he lifted a gravely warning finger to command discretion.

"Hush!" he whispered, darkly. "One moment, please!"

Thereupon Tom Twitter redoubled his assault upon the contumacious canaries in the little cages. He whistled "*Tweet, tweet, tweet!*" in all sorts of ways; he pleaded, he argued, he scolded, he asserted, declared, replied, rejoined and retorted, he warned and expostulated, all with many oratorical tricks of hands and countenance; and he concluded, at last, with a rapid peroration of trills and chirps, by which any but the most obstinately opinionated canaries known to the ornithologists must surely have been convinced of their error. And by this time all the creatures in the shop were enlisted in the dispute: there was an uproar of twitters and trills, and of squeaks and squeals and squawks, and of growls and barks and howls, which even communicated itself to an upper chamber, from which a muffled excitement came drifting down the stair. And by

An Institution of Learning

this time, too, as Tom Twitter had foreseen and intended, the Little Girl was so absorbed in the singular affair—so delighted with Tom Twitter's behaviour, which was more like a story than anything she had hitherto encountered—and altogether so charmed with Tom Twitter's politeness—that her shyness had vanished and she seemed to have known Tom Twitter all the days of her life.

IV

Alexander

“ERE you talking to them?” the Little Girl demanded, her dark eyes wide with wonder.

“I shan’t commit myself,” said Tom Twitter, flatly.

“I almost believe ——”

“Not a word!” cried Tom Twitter. “You won’t catch *me* admitting anything.”

The Little Girl gravely regarded him. She chuckled. “I believe you were,” she declared, making up her mind. “I really do.” It was a delicious adventure.

“Very well,” said Tom Twitter; “you may think what you like. *I’m* not responsible.”

“You were!” the Little Girl exulted.

Alexander

"Don't expect *me* to deny it."

"*Well!*" the Little Girl gasped. "I never *heard* of such a thing! I shouldn't have believed it if I hadn't caught you at it. I *did* catch you, didn't I?"

"Maybe you did and maybe you didn't," Tom Twitter mysteriously replied.

"I did!"

"Really?"

"I'm perfectly *sure* of it!"

"Ha, ha!" said Tom Twitter, without committing himself, as if thoroughly warned that whatever he might say would be used against him.

"Now," said the Little Girl, "I *know* it."

"You do, do you?" Tom Twitter retorted. "Well," said he, firing point-blank, his eye sharply on the struggling bundle in the Little Girl's arms, his forefinger pointing, "*how much d'ye want for that dog?*"

Heavens and earth! How much for the dog? The Little Girl jumped. She was horrified. And even the canaries

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seemed to think that old Tom Twitter had really gone a bit too far. No little girl, of course, would even *dream* of disposing of her own dog for a cash consideration ; and thus bluntly to suggest a transaction of this horrible nature—well, the thing was shockingly out of keeping with Tom Twitter's aspect of wisdom and benevolence, to say the least of it. And so the canaries, who knew Tom Twitter quite well, twittered their amazement at this new and astounding revelation of his character ; and presently the twitters—for the news was communicated like wild-fire from the cages on the counter to the cages of the topmost shelves and remotest corners—presently the twitters burst into cries of horror and condemnation. The Japanese robins complained, too ; and the parrots began to screech—and the cockatoos. And the monkeys chattered, and the puppies whimpered, and the rabbits stood stock-still, and the guinea pigs lifted their ears, and the gold-fish stared out of their bowls, and the little

Alexander

alligators shuddered : so that, indeed, it seemed Tom Twitter was all at once about to lose every friend he had in the world. As for the Little Girl, she stared horrified at Tom Twitter ; and she retreated a step, her dark eyes widening still, and she gripped the bundle with such tight affection that it emitted a small yelp of complaint. And had Tom Twitter not at that very instant luckily burst into a tintinnabulant peal of laughter she would have bolted and vanished for good and all.

“ Not for sale, eh ? ” Tom Twitter roared.
“ Ha, ha, ha ! ”

Tom Twitter was twinkling in such a reassuring and contagious fashion—and he looked so very much like a pert robin—and the whole affair was so obviously the most delectable tomfoolery—that the Little Girl could not help smiling as she shook her head. The canaries, too, taking heart again, began to twitter in a perfectly placid fashion.

“ Why not ? ” Tom Twitter wanted to know.

The Bird-Store Man

"Why—why"—the Little Girl faltered, amused with Tom Twitter's stupidity—"why, *because*, of course!"

"No answer," Tom Twitter complained.

"Because I love him so much."

"I'll bet you wouldn't take twenty-five dollars for that dog," said Tom Twitter, with his head sagely on one side.

The Little Girl opened her eyes.

"You wouldn't give me twenty-five dollars for him, would you?" she inquired, anxiously.

"Not I!"

"Are you quite sure?"

A shocking question! It seemed to imply that the Little Girl would strike a bargain with Tom Twitter. And it was a thrilling moment for all the Little Folk of the Bird-Store. There wasn't a chirp to be heard in the shop. Not a creature stirred. Not a wing fluttered. And all the canaries, you may be sure, had their heads on one side, and their ears cocked, and their eyes wide open, whilst they awaited the issue of the situation.

Alexander

"Quite sure?" says Tom Twitter. "Well, *rather!*"

"I'm very glad," said the Little Girl, vastly relieved.

"So'm I," said Tom Twitter.

And the canaries were obviously glad, too: for at once they began—or seemed to begin—to discuss the thing with the most animated and delighted approval.

"You see," explained the Little Girl, "if you offered me twenty-five dollars for my dog I should simply *have* to sell him."

There was a world of significance in this.

"Why?" Tom Twitter wanted to know.

"Oh," the Little Girl sighed, "to tide things over."

"Tide things over?"

"Yep," said the Little Girl. "Tide 'em over."

Curiosity possessed the canaries again. Shamelessly curious little creatures they are, indeed, as everybody knows. And now they stopped hopping about, and hushed one another, or, at least, certainly

The Bird-Store Man

seemed to hush one another, and cocked their heads to listen. But they got no satisfaction. Tom Twitter did not pursue the question; and the Little Girl, as though "tiding things over" were not a mysterious affair at all, but a commonplace of life, understood by everybody in the world, added nothing to the enlightenment of the interested company.

"Exactly!" Tom Twitter gasped, blankly. "To tide things over, eh? Hum. I see. Just so." Then he changed the subject—and donned another manner to suit. "What's the matter with that dog?" he demanded.

"Oh, he's sick."

"So?" said Tom Twitter, softly.

"Yes, indeed," the motherly little creature sighed; "he's—been ailing for quite a while."

"And you fancied," Tom Twitter demanded, "that the Twitter Academy for the Higher Education of Canines was a hospital?"

"Isn't it?" the Little Girl plained.

Alexander

"It is!" Tom Twitter admitted, at once. "At any rate," he qualified, with a pompous little lift of the chin, "in common with all other modernly equipped and conscientiously conducted establishments for the care and education of the young, the Twitter Academy for the Higher Education of Canines has a perfectly appointed infirmary in connection and a competent physician in constant attendance. Myself being," he added, in a very sweet way, "the competent physician." And he bowed most politely. "Do I do?"

The Little Girl shrewdly looked him over. "Yes," said she, positively.

"Name of the dog?" Tom Twitter inquired, delighted.

"Alexander."

"Age of the dog?"

"He's really quite a baby."

Tom Twitter delicately withdrew a corner of the shawl and discovered a plebeian and woebegone countenance. He said, "Hum!" in a non-committal way. Then he frowned and pursed his lips. This was

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ominous. "Do you love the dog?" he asked.

The Little Girl sighed.

"I perceive," said Tom Twitter, coldly, "that you do not."

"I do!" declared the indignant Little Girl.

"That being so," said Tom Twitter, sagely, "we shall have to look very carefully into this. This way with the patient, if you please."

And the canaries twittered approval.

V

A Hospital Case



T was blowing high : a bitter wintry darkness without ; and Tom Twitter's little old establishment for the education of canines, which seemed to have survived a hundred years of degenerating acquaintance with the weather, shivered in the wind, and voiced a thousand melancholy forebodings, as it never had before. A sad night : a night come with sinister promise of suffering for the unfortunate. Such a night, indeed, as disease works its will in : such a night as creates grief where sadness forever dwells. Tom Twitter's establishment sang in the gale like an Æolian harp : but never sweetly—but with moans and groans, and with ghastly laughter, and with the start-

The Bird-Store Man

ling accompaniment (due to the ancient casements) of either ghostly or muffled kettle-drums, as you may choose, and with thin, far-away shrieks: so that, all the little folk of the cages and hutches having now fallen quiet (except the canaries), the usually joyous establishment was uneasy and distraught when the physical examination of Alexander was undertaken. The Little Girl was downcast: so was Tom Twitter; and so to a pitiful degree was the wretched Alexander. Alexander was a sick dog; the sight of him—and his courageous effort to preserve a decent appearance of jollity—fairly anguished the beholder.

Stretched out on the counter, flat on his back, with his limp little legs in the air and his weary head lolling—stripped bare, as it were, for a rigorous investigation of his trouble—Alexander disclosed, aside from well-defined symptoms of invalidism, nothing whatsoever to invite the affections. He was a long, gawky little youngster, white of colour, but with a surprising suggestion

A Hospital Case

of black spots mysteriously distributed over his lank person, as though the colour, honestly enough come by, no doubt, had declined to emerge beyond the skin in betrayal of Alexander's mixed ancestry; and he had a long, crooked tail, with a broken tip, which flapped helplessly about, in rather drear response to the excitement of its major portion; and one ear was as alertly cocked, and as inquiring, and as defiant, as a bull-terrier's, and the other was as loose and as obsequious as a hound's; and there was a perfectly round, very pronounced, very, very black fox-terrier-like spot encircling one rheumy eye, as if asserting Alexander's pretensions to legitimate descent. The Little Girl explained, in affectionate apology, that although Alexander, generally speaking, was a fox-terrier, he had been accused of being "part coach." And with this Tom Twitter could very well agree. In view of the obvious facts, he conceived the accusation innocuous.

In the portentous way of a family

The Bird-Store Man

physician of the old school, which Tom Twitter had cultivated with shrewd and jovial assiduity for employment in the delight of his patrons, Tom Twitter now regarded the naked Alexander, beginning the difficult business of diagnosis. He put on his spectacles, he sighed, he pursed his lips, he frowned mightily, he ejaculated "Hum!" in a fashion at once hopeful and discouraging, but altogether significant of abounding wisdom. And then, great gold watch in hand, his face all screwed with profundity, he deliberately counted Alexander's pulse: whereupon he said "Hum!" again, with a little lift of triumph, as if he were already on the track of the trouble. Next he sounded Alexander's lungs, tap-tap-tapping all over the astounded little patient's chest, in the most scientific way: whereupon he said "Hum!" once more, this time with a smack of satisfaction, as if nothing in the world could elude his professional acumen when his interest was really awakened. Finally, he listened to Alexander's heart-

A Hospital Case

beat, and lifted Alexander's eyelids, and poked about Alexander's shrinking abdomen, and took a perfunctory look at Alexander's tongue: whereupon he snorted "Hum!" for the last time, his face all wreathed in smiles, his eyes gleaming, his brows victoriously lifted, as if he had not only run the trouble to earth but had discovered himself the master of it.

"Well?" the Little Girl grimly demanded, prepared for the worst.

Tom Twitter deliberated for a moment, his face fallen profound; and then all at once he looked at the Little Girl over his spectacles and shortly pronounced:

"Indigestion."

"Indigestion!" echoed the Little Girl.

"Hush!" Tom Twitter whispered, with a jerk towards the limp Alexander. "Not so loud. You might alarm him."

"Is it serious?"

"A hospital case, I fear."

The Little Girl caught her breath in alarm. "Oh!" she breathed. "Will he——"

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"Tut, tut!" Tom Twitter interrupted, hurriedly. "Don't speak the word. Die? Bosh! Serious? Yes, of course! My dear, everything is serious. A little neglect may make a mortal wound of a pin-prick. There's nothing more alarming in the world than a Symptom. But"—he pursed his lips and impressively paused—"fortunately you have taken Alexander's trouble in time; and fortunately, too, if I may be permitted to say so—though I have no wish to be guilty of professional discourtesy—fortunately, too, I may add, you have brought Alexander to the Right Shop. Alexander shall have every care and attention. My skill, such as it is, is completely at his service. Alexander is young. He seems to have inherited a robust constitution. And so far as appears—my examination was not, however, as exhaustive as it might have been—so far as appears, I say, he has not dissipated his natural endowment of good health. And that's the thing that counts."

All this was bewildering to the Little

A Hospital Case

Girl ; but Tom Twitter's pomposity was so convincing that she nodded her head as if she understood every word.

Tom Twitter promised that Alexander would pull through. "Come, now !" he demanded ; "have you the courage to leave him with me ? "

"If it doesn't cost too ——"

"Cost !" cried Tom Twitter. "My dear child, you shame the profession ! Never —never again so long as you live—speak of the fee to a physician in the early stages of his professional activity. Come, now ! Will you part with Alexander ? "

"Oh, yes !" replied the Little Girl. "Thank you."

"Very well," said Tom Twitter. "That's settled. Alexander shall have a compartment in the Junior Dormitory. This way, if you please. The sooner he's stowed away the better." And with that, having taken, Alexander in his arms, and put a collar and chain in his own pocket, Tom Twitter led the way to a little back stair.

VI

In the Schoolroom



OLLOWING close and timidly on the nimble heels of Tom Twitter the Little Girl presently found herself in a dim apartment overlooking the street. A point of gaslight illuminated it. There was nothing more—except a radiance of wintry moonlight falling at intervals through the windows. There was a little stirring in the shadows, as Tom Twitter tiptoed within— heavy breathing, a whimper, a mournful bark. The Little Girl started. Tom Twitter whispered “Hush !” They waited for quiet—the Little Girl meanwhile staring about. And here, indeed, was a singular place ! A wide deal bench, divided into a row of commodious compartments, precisely as in a dog show, ran the length of



Tom Twitter promised that Alexander would
pull through

In the Schoolroom

two sides of the room ; and in almost every compartment—and there must surely have been a round dozen of them—one of Tom Twitter's resident pupils was sound asleep, comfortably curled up on a bed of clean straw, with a bowl of water beside him for the drear emergency of wakefulness. It was an airy chamber, agreeably full of frost, with the windows dropped a little at the top, as in all well-regulated dormitories. And the floor was of polished hardwood, a wide, clear, inviting space, as clean-swept as the floor of a gymnasium, which it much resembled. And there was a high wain-scotting of oak, with creamy walls above, upon which, executed in resplendent Old English characters, a number of old-fashioned maxims grimly did their duty by a new and doubtless heedless generation.

"There Is No Royal Road to Learning," they declared, in tones as robust as of old. *"Proficiency is the Reward of Industry."*

Well, here obviously was Tom Twitter's dormitory : the rows of sleeping residents made *that* plain enough ; and here, too—

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as there could be no misunderstanding the significance of the maxims—was the schoolroom of the Twitter Academy for the Higher Education of Canines. But the Little Girl could make neither head nor tail of the curious paraphernalia of instruction. There was a round globe, for example, gaudily painted in segments of red, white and blue; and there was a long, cylindrical affair of basketwork, open at both ends; and there were hoops, both great and small, one of which, it was plain, had once been stretched with white paper, like the head of a drum, but was now shattered, as if one of Tom Twitter's pupils had impishly jumped straight through it; and there were little wooden chairs, and a little wooden cannon, and a charming see-saw, all painted white and adorned with gilt trimmings; and there was a whole series of velvet-covered pedestals, and various articles of wearing apparel (including a very small top-hat), and a miniature bicycle, and a number of gymnastic appliances for which the Little Girl could

In the Schoolroom

discover no reasonable utility whatsoever. And so the Little Girl was mightily mystified; but had she been acquainted with the useful occupations to which highly-educated canines may aspire she would at a glance have solved every difficulty which the paraphernalia presented to the understanding.

Tom Twitter installed Alexander and patted and smoothed him into contentment with his surprising situation. Tom Twitter whispered to the Little Girl that Alexander's next neighbour to the west was a wealthy little Blue Ribbon Pomeranian, of fashionable lineage, to be sure, but to be commended neither for cleverness nor industry, for the sad young rascal was not yet advanced beyond the Kindergarten Department, though he had been resident quite long enough to have been graduated with modest accomplishments. Tom Twitter cautiously informed the Little Girl that Alexander's next neighbour to the east was a marvellous French Poodle, of obscure origin, received by special ar-

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rangement in the matter of terms, but a canine genius, b'gad! now successfully pursuing the study of Advanced Acrobatics and bound to make a name for himself. Tom Twitter protested, in low, earnest sentences, that the Twitter Academy was a select institution, personal attention to each and every pupil, and that no pupil was accepted without a personal interview, and that none was retained who betrayed the least disposition towards vicious behaviour, and that there was not a reprobate in the school, so far as Tom Twitter was aware, and that the Little Girl might be absolutely at ease as concerned the character of Alexander's new associates. And when Tom Twitter had accomplished all this he led the way back to the shop and there confronted the Little Girl with a proud and sparkling countenance.

VII

Alexander Is Enrolled

“OW,” says Tom Twitter,
“how about Alexander’s
education?”

The little girl smiled.
“I hadn’t thought of
sending him to school,”

she chuckled.

“High time to think of it!” Tom
Twitter declared, accusingly.

“I really don’t know.”

“I strongly advise it,” urged Tom Twit-
ter; “he’s a capable youngster.”

“He’s not very clever.”

“Sharp as a needle!”

“And he’s not very well bred.”

“As for breeding,” said Tom Twitter,
loftily, “I may confidentially inform you,
my dear, that I find the aristocracy aston-
ishingly dull in an intellectual way.”

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The Little Girl deliberated. "Perhaps," she began, "if the expense ——"

"Not a cent of expense!" cried Tom Twitter. "Alexander shall have a scholarship. The Twitter Academy," he ran on, with his chin up, "is amply able to provide free board and tuition for impecunious and deserving dogs—and indeed makes a happy practice of doing so." And he bowed. "I'm quite sure," he added, "that Alexander would not only distinguish himself but honour the institution. The Academy would be proud to accept him on any terms."

"We-ell ——" the Little Girl yielded.

"Good!" cried Tom Twitter. "I'll make a man of him. Why, my dear," he declared, enthusiastically, "when I get through with that youngster's education he'll be *worth* twenty-five dollars."

The Little Girl started. "I think I'll not have him educated," said she.

"But, my dear ——"

"No," the Little Girl protested. "I don't *want* him to be worth twenty-five

Alexander is Enrolled

dollars. I might have to sell him, you see, to—to—tide us over."

"Oh, come, now!" Tom Twitter begged. "You're not going to be selfish enough to deny Alexander ——"

"Oh, my, no!"

"Well, then?"

"We-ell ——" the Little Girl yielded for the second time.

"Good!" cried Tom Twitter again. "And now," said he, coming straight to the point, "do you intend Alexander for a professional career?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Vaudeville or circus?"

"Oh, my, no!"

"Exactly!" Tom Twitter agreed. "I understand. What you desire for Alexander is a cultural course designed to advance him in the social graces. Nothing profound—nothing perilous. An excellent idea, my dear! The very thing! Splendid! A little learning of that sort, discreetly employed in after life, will surely further Alexander's fortunes, and may for-

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tuitously be the means of introducing him to the fashionable world. Frankly, there is nothing so likely as accomplished behaviour to win the soothing recognition of an occasional pat on the head—and indeed to gain an occasional bite to eat in quarters where the food is mostly tid-bits and really worth tasting. Everybody knows that much, I'm sure ! ”

To this the Little Girl blankly assented.

“Very well, then,” Tom Twitter continued, tapping his forehead and beginning to pace the floor in a determined endeavour to arrange a suitable course of instruction for Alexander according to these specifications. “Let me see. Hum ! Precisely ! ”—and he seemed now to have decided the matter to the satisfaction of his professional wisdom. “I shall recommend, in the circumstances, if you will permit me, a course in Polite Deportment and Parlour Tricks. What d'ye say t' that ? Mm-m ? ”

“It sounds very nice,” the Little Girl agreed.

“Permit me to elaborate,” said Tom

Alexander is Enrolled

Twitter. And on he rattled, reciting glibly from the published curriculum of the Academy, which he had off by heart, and which anybody might have had to read for the asking, for there was a sheaf of those diverting pamphlets on the counter : “ Course in Polite Deportment and Parlour Tricks. Elementary : (a) To speak when spoken to ; (b) to shake the hand when proffered ; (c) to leap through the arms at the word of command, said arms being held in the form of a hoop, with the hands locked ; (d) to fetch objects of any variety when thrown by the master (or mistress) and remaining in plain view ; and (e) to counterfeit the appearance of death and to assume the posture of prayer. Same course. Advanced : (a) To sit up on the haunches ; (b) to perambulate on the posterior extremities ; (c) to wear a top-hat, by means of an elastic band, when either sitting up on the haunches or perambulating on the posterior extremities ; (d) to seize between the teeth, and there retain, a pipe, when wearing a top-hat, by means of

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an elastic band, and sitting up on the haunches or perambulating on the posterior extremities ; and (e) to simulate the movements of the waltz when in a perpendicular position on the posterior extremities. There !” Tom Twitter concluded, beaming. “ How’s that ? ”

“ It seems to be very difficult,” was the best the Little Girl could manage.

“ Difficult ? Bosh ! ” cried Tom Twitter. “ You just leave it to Bob Scotch and me. And that reminds me, my dear ”—with an accomplished bow—“ you really must oblige me by meeting my First Assistant.”

“ I should like to,” said the Little Girl, politely.

“ A charming fellow ! ” Tom Twitter promised.

VIII

Bob Scotch



ITH a flourish, so gallant, indeed, that it exhibited the very essence of the virtue of the Academy's course in Polite Deportment, Tom Twitter bowed, and smiled, and raised his eyebrows, in a most polite interrogation, and said, "One moment, if you please?" and skipped back to the stair. And he whistled, "*Whee, whee, whee, whee!*" as if confidently expecting a response. But there was no response. Not a whisper! Not a stir! The little shop, above and below, was quiet, except for a sleepy twittering and the noises of the rampant gale. Tom Twitter was shocked. He started. He lifted his eyebrows still higher. He flushed. He scowled. His countenance twisted with

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indignation. He whistled "*Whee, whee, whee, whee!*" once more, this time rapidly, with an outraged assertion of authority. And still there was no response. Not a sound of it! And Tom Twitter, quite purple with anger, gasped and snorted, and stamped his foot and clapped his hands, and whistled once more, as if for the very last time, the hour of grace being past, "*Whee—whee—whee—WHEE!*" with such threatening significance that the very dead must have responded to the command.

"There!" Tom Twitter gloated.
"*That'll fetch him!*"

Tom Twitter hearkened: the Little Girl hearkened. It was a moment most tense and important. And there was a slow stirring above. It was followed—much to the relief of Tom Twitter—by a lazy shuffle which Tom Twitter seemed to understand. And then footsteps sounded from the stair: a thump, a delayed thump-thump, another shuffle, a scratching, a silence, a second scratching, and a slow,

Bob Scotch

heavy thump-thump-thump. Somebody was evidently descending. But who? The Little Girl was distracted. And then a thump from the stair, and a thump-thump; and then a pause—and then a long, hopeless, squeaking, lazy yawn. There was no question about the yawn: it was a genuine, grateful yawn, so frank in expression, indeed, that it might have been performed in solitude, and doubtless was executed in the blissful illusion of solitude. And presently the First Assistant, much bored by the necessity, poked his head into the shop, as if wondering what in the world was the matter. And there he stood, tired and smiling and fatuous: a golden-brown collie dog, shaggy, sharp-pointed of nose, exquisitely fashioned, with a white collar, apparently just returned from the laundry, and the daintiest of white-tipped feet. He was immensely bored and desirous of sleep, it seemed; but he was still indulgently tolerant of the whimsicalities of Tom Twitter.

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"Wake up, Bob Scotch!" cried Tom Twitter. "For shame!"

Bob Scotch wagged his tail.

"My dear," said Tom Twitter to the Little Girl, in the bland manner of one introducing a celebrity, "I present Bob Scotch."

It was a proceeding so formal that the Little Girl barely saved her dignity. She was on the very point of dropping a curtsy; but she managed to restrain the impulse, and merely bowed, instead.

"Bob Scotch, you rascal!" cried Tom Twitter; "come here, sir!"

Bob Scotch shuffled across the floor.

"Sit up, sir," says Tom Twitter, "and shake hands with the Little Lady!"

Bob Scotch sat up and with impeccable politeness offered his paw.

"Isn't he cute!" cried the Little Girl.

"Hush!" Tom Twitter whispered. "No flattery, if you please. The old scoundrel thinks quite enough of himself as it is."

"Please don't!" the Little Girl scolded.

Bob Scotch

"Don't what?"

"Call him an old scoundrel."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Tom Twitter. "I'll call him what I please. Do you think *he* cares?" Apparently Bob Scotch did not care a whit. He was smiling and grinning away as if he were quite sure of Tom Twitter's affection no matter what the old gentleman might call him. "And he *is* an old scoundrel—a fat, lazy old scoundrel," Tom Twitter ran on. "What do you suppose," he demanded, "the old chap's duties are? Nothing but to be present during school hours—and especially at private lessons—and more especially still when the pupils are particularly backward—nothing but to be present upon such occasions and illustrate to the young students the meaning of my commands when I utter them. That's why he's called my First Assistant. For example, when the command is to sit up on the haunches, Bob Scotch sits up on the haunches. Pupil observes Bob Scotch sitting up on the haunches. Pupil very

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naturally connects the word of command with the attitude of Bob Scotch. And presently we find the pupil sitting up on the haunches at the word of command just as soon as that word is uttered. I couldn't get along without Bob Scotch, you know. And Bob Scotch knows it. And that's why I call him an old scoundrel—to keep his self-conceit within bounds, you know. If I didn't abuse him occasionally he would be a perfectly impossible creature to live with."

Presently after that Tom Twitter said good-night to the Little Girl and turned to on his evening paper.

IX

Rules and Regulations



F you propose to entrust a beloved and only canine to Tom Twitter's care —

“One thing,” says Tom Twitter, “I insist upon.”

“And what's that?” you inquire.

“That the residence of this young man in the institution shall surely issue,” says the astonishing old gentleman, gravely, with a fatherly hand on the prospective pupil, “in attainments ample to justify the sacrifices made at home in his behalf.”

If you are not old enough to catch the twinkle in Tom Twitter's eye you are mightily impressed. And you must be *quite* old to be able to catch that twinkle—fourteen or fifteen years old at the very least. If you are six or seven—even if

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you are ten or eleven—the twinkle will escape you. You will be mightily impressed, as I say ; you will know at once, if you have never known it before, that education is a serious business, and that in placing your beloved canine in the Twitter Academy you are taking an important step, and that in receiving him Tom Twitter is undertaking a grave responsibility. And when Tom Twitter points to the mottoes on the wall, which declare that *There is No Royal Road to Learning* and that *Proficiency is the Reward of Industry*, you realize the truth of these excellent maxims as never before. And when Tom Twitter informs you that Persistent and Contumacious Dereliction Results in Expulsion you understand at least that application and good behaviour are demanded of every resident pupil. And when Tom Twitter goes on to say, with even greater solemnity, that the responsible authorities are determined to return full value for the fee received for board and tuition at the Twitter Academy, and that therefore your

Rules and Regulations

beloved canine will not be permitted to spend the week-ends at home, or to be indulged by you in any way inconsistent with his health and progress, you are impressed for good and all with the excellence of the institution.

"I take it, my dear sir," says Tom Twitter, with a charming bow, if you are ten or eleven years old, and he is *quite* sure that you have not observed the little twinkle in his eye, "that I have sufficiently explained the rules of the institution?"

"Yes, sir," you return.

"And the consequence of any considerable infraction of the rules?"

"Yes, sir."

"You understand, I am sure, that in this institution of learning we demand the highest achievement compatible with the pupil's health?"

"Yes, sir."

"And commensurate with his capacity?"

"Yes, sir."

"You comprehend, do you not, what

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will overtake you if you pester me with applications for indulgence?"

"I take my dog away?"

"Exactly!" says Tom Twitter, beaming. "My dear sir," says he, bowing again, "you understand me perfectly!"

If you are six or seven years old—or even ten or eleven years old—you like this very much; and if you are much, much older, if you are as much as forty years old, and have caught the first gleam of Tom Twitter's twinkle, and have not meanly misapprehended the detectable old fellow, you are quite as much delighted with Tom Twitter's pomposity and long words and solemnity of deportment, provided only that you have the good fortune to be in the company of a new patron of the institution who is not more than six or seven years old—not more than ten or eleven, at the most. You do not call Tom Twitter an old fool in your heart. You are astounded—you are awed—by the understanding which you perceive exists between Tom Twitter and his small

Rules and Regulations

patrons. It is as though Tom Twitter speaks to them in a language you know nothing about. And if you should be inclined to doubt Tom Twitter, to think him a fool or a charlatan, and if you should chance to engage Tom Twitter in discussion, after hours, in the shop, being in disagreement with him, political disagreement, social, religious, scientific, or artistic, Tom Twitter would dispose of your contentions so quickly, so neatly, with such a display of acumen and learning, that he would presently have you laughing at your own absurd notion that Tom Twitter knew nothing and that you knew anything at all.

X

Convalescence



DID Alexander get well? To be sure Alexander got well! A pill or two, attention to diet, a little mental distraction, a bit of exercise, rest and freedom from anxiety—a reasonable routine of life, in short, combined with Tom Twitter's jovial encouragement—and the amazing restoration was accomplished. Alexander cheered up. Presently he began to throw off his indisposition. Within the week he was in buoyant health again. It was obvious that he was capable not only of strenuous bodily exertion but of any amount of intellectual activity. But old Tom Twitter was a wise schoolmaster—a schoolmaster who took his profession seriously and with a live conscience, re-

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garding the welfare of his charges quite as highly as his own pecuniary advantage and the reputation of his institution for efficiency in tuition. The Twitter Academy for the Higher Education of Canines was not a "cramming" institution. Tom Twitter believed in health and happiness. Health and happiness (said he) were conditions precedent to all true progress in scholarship. Not for the world would he have jeopardized Alexander's sensitive natural capacity by compelling him to undertake the mastery of even the most elementary accomplishment of the Course in Polite Deportment and Parlour Tricks before he was in health and spirits indubitably sufficient to apply his young mind to the effort without risking the grave consequences of repeated mental exhaustion.

"Patience, my son," says Tom Twitter.

Alexander wagged his tail in agreement with this philosophy of education.

"Trust *me*," says Tom Twitter. "*I'll* have you up with your class in no time."

In consequence of this admirable deter-

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mination Alexander had ample opportunity to adjust himself to the circumstances of his school life before entering actively into the pleasures and duties of it. He escaped all the wretched perturbations which ordinarily hamper and discourage those pupils whose misfortune it is to be cast unexpectedly into the loneliness and perplexing activities of a new school at mid-term; and possibly this in a measure accounts for his subsequent extraordinary progress, though old Tom Twitter, who speaks with authority, surely, says, "Nothing of the sort, sir!"—and taps his own expansive brow to indicate that nothing short of a remarkable natural endowment of intellect could account for the rapidity of Alexander's achievement. Whatever it was—whether it was a happy endowment of genius, or the mere dogged habit of industry, or a precocious appreciation of the beauty and value of the knowledge which the curriculum of the institution was designed to impart, or a fine determination to make the best of his opportunities, or

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an affectionate response to Tom Twitter's enthusiastic endeavours, or the inspiration of the Little Girl's delighted applause—Alexander had at any rate this considerable advantage: that his introduction to his classmates, and to all the customs of the establishment, was completely accomplished before he was required to display his quality as a responsible student in the exercises of the schoolroom.

Throughout his convalescence, Alexander observed, from his invalid's stall, the routine of the morning and afternoon sessions of the academy; and he watched it all, too, with absorbed interest, one ear up and one ear down, eyes round, head on one side, as though profiting vastly, and arranging, perhaps, his own conduct in the event of having to confront the same inexplicable circumstances as the busy scholars in the middle of the floor. Every morning at nine o'clock, and every afternoon at two o'clock, Tom Twitter breezed up from the shop, with a bowl of tidbits in his hand and old Bob Scotch

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lagging unutterably bored at his heels ; and no sooner had Tom Twitter crossed the threshold of the schoolroom than he began to chatter in a most humorous and hearty fashion to the class, as though the business of imparting and receiving instruction in the Twitter Academy were the happiest employment in the world, and as though Tom Twitter were the luckiest old chap in the world, and knew it, too, and would not exchange his opportunity for any other that could be imagined, and as though the regularly enrolled members of the Twitter Academy for the Higher Education of Canines were the luckiest dogs in the world, and ought to be aware of it, and must be *made* aware of it, to the exclusion of every gloomy notion to the contrary, and ought to express their joy in their situation by giving the most careful attention to every word that Tom Twitter uttered and instantly obeying every one of his commands.

All this being so—Tom Twitter's austere theory of teaching being unquestionably

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executed in the practices of the schoolroom every morning and afternoon—it would not be surprising if Alexander did indeed learn a profitable course of behaviour from observation. The observation was close and constant. It seemed—it seemed, I say—that Alexander was reflecting; but that Alexander actually put two and two together and drew the clever inference that reward contributed more to the happiness of a dog than punishment I have no means of knowing beyond dispute. Alexander heard Tom Twitter's jovial "Good-morning, young gentleman!" and his equally jovial "And how are we this afternoon, young gentleman?" and was at once aware of the outburst of barking and the wagging of tails which never failed to greet Tom Twitter's appearance. Sometimes Tom Twitter made a speech before proceeding to the exercises of the day—a pithy little speech (as schoolmasters will): a few words of admonition, of praise, of kindly encouragement; or trifled in a humorous way. I'm sure that not a dog of

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the lot knew upon such occasions what Tom Twitter was driving at. And I haven't the slightest idea why Tom Twitter should indulge this propensity with no better audience than he had. Make little speeches he would, however; and that's an end of it. Perhaps it was for his own delight and encouragement.

And then the day's work. The Course in Polite Deportment and Parlour Tricks: the Course in Advanced Acrobatics. Necessarily, it was individual instruction. And a grind it was, too—a schoolroom grind: precisely the sort of grind that goes on in all the schoolrooms of the land day after day. There were dull pupils, clever pupils, indifferent pupils, incorrigible pupils—pupils whose progress it was a delight to behold, pupils who stood unaccountably still, pupils who lingered on the very verge of expulsion. One after another they came to the middle of the floor for instruction in the various accomplishments of the curriculum. They sat up at the word of command, they perambulated on the posterior

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extremities, they assumed the posture of prayer, they performed acrobatic feats of great agility ; and each according to his deserts was rewarded from Tom Twitter's bowl of tidbits or punished persistently (but lightly) with a tap of Tom Twitter's stick. And all the while poor old Bob Scotch illustrated for the struggling pupils the execution of Tom Twitter's commands. No wonder old Bob Scotch was bored ! Small shame to Bob Scotch if he thought—as probably he did—that the average intelligence of dog-kind was really beneath contempt. And you will not be surprised to learn that both Bob Scotch and Tom Twitter sometimes came to the end of the school day worn out with labour and discouragement. It is the fate of headmasters and instructors.

And at last Tom Twitter remarked to Alexander one afternoon —

“To-morrow, my son, we begin !”

XI

“ Mad Dog!”



ATE in the afternoon of the next day the Little Girl arrived at the Twitter Academy for the Higher Education of Canines. She was to observe for herself (she was informed) those cunning methods of instruction which had made the fortune of that celebrated institution. And she was delighted: she was in a pretty flutter of expectation—cheeks rosy, eyes bright, dimples deep and ravishing. Tom Twitter himself ushered her into the school-room, exhibiting, the while, his very best deportment, as though she had but a moment before alighted from a gigantic automobile, in the way of the most fashionable of all the little fashionables who regularly

“Mad Dog!”

distinguished him with patronage. It was with exquisite gallantry, indeed, that Tom Twitter escorted the Little Girl to a chair, placed somewhat remotely against the wall, and there beamed and bowed, and bowed and beamed, until the Little Girl was all in warm blushes from the flattering attention, and all tingling, too, from her little toes to her curls, with delicious amusement. And when Tom Twitter had informed her, in a few well-chosen words, and in a politely modulated voice, that he had come to expect great things of Alexander, and that the first lesson would probably disclose the extent and quality of Alexander's intellect, she instantly realized the gravity of the occasion, and stiffened with anxiety, and hoped with all her heart that Alexander would justify Tom Twitter's good opinion and even exceed her own high expectation.

Greatly to his bewilderment the young Alexander was unleashed and curtly bidden to the middle of the schoolroom floor.

“Sit up, sir!” says Tom Twitter.

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Alexander's eyes strayed to the figure of his mistress ; and Alexander wagged his tail and hind-quarters so violently that he almost lost his balance.

"Your attention, sir," says Tom Twitter, severely, "*if* you please !"

Tom Twitter's lifted, menacing finger, and Tom Twitter's tone of voice, and Tom Twitter's blazing eyes, shocked Alexander into the state of attention desired.

"Sit up, sir !" Tom Twitter commanded.

Bob Scotch sat up, thus illustrating, for Alexander's benefit, the meaning of the word of command.

"Up, sir !"

Well, now, of course, I have no intention to disclose, here completely in print, the cunning methods employed at the Twitter Academy for the Higher Education of Canines. I am not in the least afraid that competition would drive Tom Twitter out of business. I warn you that nothing in the world could divert truly fashionable patronage from that old gentleman's alluring establishment. What I do fear is this :

“Mad Dog!”

that Tom Twitter's methods, being imitated and misapplied—as they surely would be if employed by anybody but Tom Twitter—would inevitably work wide-spread injury to the rising generation of canines; and I would not have such a thing happen for anything—nor would Tom Twitter. Consequently I shall not tell you what part a lump or two of sugar played in Alexander's first astonishing lesson, nor what part Tom Twitter's little wand of correction played, nor precisely how Tom Twitter enlightened Alexander by manipulating Alexander's limp body, nor how Tom Twitter taught Alexander to choose with wisdom between reward and punishment. At the end of no more than twenty minutes of Tom Twitter's amazingly effective instruction—you may believe it or not—Alexander knew perfectly well what was required of him when Tom Twitter commanded him to sit up on the haunches. All that he needed to learn was a muscular mastery of the posture and the advisability of prompt obedience to the

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command. The former would come with practice: the latter Alexander had already begun to suspect.

"A canine genius!" Tom Twitter declared to the Little Girl. "I'm delighted with him!"

"Isn't he clever, though?" the Little Girl chuckled.

"I have conducted this establishment for a good many years," said Tom Twitter, "and I have not encountered his equal. I congratulate you, madam. Alexander will achieve great things. It will be a splendid satisfaction to you. He will master the Course in Polite Deportment and Parlour Tricks in no time. I propose not only to have him undertake the work of the regular morning and afternoon sessions but to afford him private and personal instruction as opportunity offers. And when he has concluded the Course in Polite Deportment and Parlour Tricks, if you will permit me to advise you, I suggest that the Course in Acrobatics would not be beyond his strength and capacity,

“Mad Dog!”

and possibly even the Course in Advanced Acrobatics. Trust *me*, my dear madam, to guard against overstrain. Nothing of the sort, upon my word, shall happen to Alexander. And I particularly desire to exhibit to the patrons of the institution a salutary example of what the institution can accomplish when it has genius to work with. Presently Visiting Day will be along. The patrons of the institution will gather by invitation. It is an affair of fashion—of considerable social magnitude. There will be Graduation Exercises. I have no hesitation in predicting that Alexander will be Valedictorian of the Class. Come now!—shall we say the Course in Advanced Acrobatics, to provide Alexander with every opportunity for distinction?”

Tom Twitter beamed so invitingly that the Little Girl could not refuse him.

“It will be perfectly lovely!” said she.

At that moment there was a creak of brakes, and the screech of a horn, in the street, as though a motor-car had come to

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a stop at the door. Tom Twitter's bell tinkled, indicating that a customer had entered the shop; and then there was the tramp of feet, crossing the floor below, and a stumbling tread on the stair, and an impatient young voice commanding, "Come on here! What's the matter with you, you little brute? Come on here, won't you?" And then Master Eton Collar stalked unceremoniously into the school-room, dragging at his heels, by a short leather leash, the most dejected and reluctant dog that the Little Girl had ever clapped eyes on. Master Eton Collar was one of the most fashionable of the academy's fashionable patrons—a carefully groomed, masterful little chap, used to having his way, but not a bad sort, I'm sure; and he was the owner of the Blue Ribbon Pomeranian which had not yet advanced beyond the Kindergarten Department. Tom Twitter's glance went straight to the dejected dog at Master Eton Collar's heels; and there Tom Twitter's glance remained, growing fixed and

“Mad Dog!”

searching and even alarmed : for Master Eton Collar's dog, a mongrel terrier of some sort, it seemed, was indeed the most forlorn creature to be imagined—an unkempt, dejected little cur, uneasy, ashamed, shivering, ears flat, head hanging, tail between his legs, and an expression of angry misery quite beyond description.

“ Good-afternoon,” says Eton Collar.

“ And to you, my boy,” Tom Twitter replied.

“ How's my Pomeranian ? ”

“ Your Pomeranian, my dear fellow,” said Tom Twitter, his glance still appraising the dejected new arrival, “ is as wayward and stupid as ever.”

“ Well,” said Eton Collar, “ I got another dog.”

“ Just so,” said Tom Twitter, eyeing the other dog with greater disfavour than ever.

“ I want a trick dog,” Eton Collar declared, “ and I bet you this little mongrel has more brains in his tail than the Pomeranian has in his whole body. Anyhow,

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that's what they *say* about mongrels. And that's why I've brought him here."

"Where did you get that dog?" Tom Twitter inquired.

"Found him in the street."

"Know who owns him?"

"Nobody owns this dog. He's a stray."

"Appropriated him? Then you deserve all that's coming to you. Haven't I told you often enough to have nothing to do with stray dogs? How long have you had that dog?"

"About an hour."

"Hum!" Tom Twitter mused. And then he asked with sudden and alarmed interest: "Is that a wart I see on your right hand?"

"Sure it is. What of it?"

"Gloves off coming down town?"

"Yep."

"Been picking that wart?"

"Oh, a little bit."

"Bleeding?"

"Yep."

"Dog lick it?"

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“Oh, he’s an affectionate little beast,” Eton Collar replied, fondly. “He’s been licking me all the way down. Wouldn’t leave me alone. Licked my face. Licked my hands. I bet he wanted to *cure* my wart. Never *saw* such a little lick. Why? What’s the matter with the dog? What’s the dog got to do with my warts?”

“I strongly suspect,” said Tom Twitter, “that your dog is mad !”

XII

In Peril



MASTER ETON COLLAR dropped the leash and backed away. "Mad dog!" he ejaculated.

"Mad dog!" gasped the Little Girl.

"Mad dog," Tom Twitter repeated. "And his tongue is alive with contagion."

"G'wan!" Eton Collar scoffed. "There's nothing the matter with that dog."

"Really?" says Tom Twitter.

"He's an affectionate little beast, I tell you," Eton Collar insisted. "Why, the little beast snuggled up and licked my hand all the way down here. That dog isn't mad."

"That dog," said Tom Twitter, sternly, "is obviously in the wandering stage of hydrophobia. You'll be convinced of that,

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young man, when you take your punctures at the Pasteur Institute. And the incredible thing is this : that you have attended my lectures to children in this very room—I recall your presence distinctly—and have not had the intelligence to protect yourself against infection. And the fault lies with you, sir. My description of the conspicuous symptoms of hydrophobia was perfectly clear. Did I not warn you to suspect a dog in which there occurred a marked and unaccountable change of habit ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Should he appear extraordinarily restless ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And should he hide away in dark corners contrary to his usual behaviour and with singular persistency ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And did I not warn you that your suspicion should be in a measure confirmed if the dog manifested an extraordinary excess of affection ? ”

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"Yes, sir."

"Should he attempt persistently to lick your hands, your face, your clothing—and continue so to lick your hands, your face, your clothing, in an unnatural manner?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what next, sir?" Tom Twitter demanded.

"Appetite."

"Exactly. Appetite. A debased appetite. And now we shall test the appetite of this most miserable little beast." With that, Tom Twitter selected a tidbit from his bowl and invited the dejected mongrel to partake. But the dejected mongrel would have nothing to do with Tom Twitter's delectable tidbit. Nor did he display the least interest in a tempting lump of Tom Twitter's sugar. He sat vacant and dispirited: he turned away his head and mourned. But when Tom Twitter offered him a bit of string he was intensely interested and greedily gobbled it up. And he disposed of a few scraps of paper with the same feverish gusto; nor

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did he despise—indeed he heartily enjoyed—two matches and one of Tom Twitter's cigarettes. By this time he had awakened to a new interest in life: he kept an eager, feverish eye on Tom Twitter, as though hoping for some still undreamed of addition to the bill of fare; and when Tom Twitter, in desperation for outlandish diet, offered him a bunch of violets, which some patron of the institution had left behind, he fell upon it voraciously and gobbled up every flower and leaf. It was shocking. And in conjunction with other symptoms it confirmed Tom Twitter's suspicion almost to the point of certainty that Eton Collar's dog was imminently approaching that stage of hydrophobia which breaks out in fury and ends in a dreadful death.

"I will confine this dog," said he, "for further observation."

All this time Alexander had been regarding the strange dog with intense curiosity. And now—curiosity overcoming caution—he approached before Tom Twit-

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ter could intervene. Not too near : near enough to sniff and be convinced—not near enough to be reached. The mongrel snapped. It was quick as a flash. And Alexander bolted with a howl of terror—bolted for the refuge of his stall, and there cowered in a corner, shivering and whimpering. He had not been bitten. Nor was it in his mind to run the risk of being bitten in conflict. Spirited dog though he was, he had no stomach for conflict with that particular mongrel. But the mongrel thirsted for conflict with Alexander, in the way of all mad dogs ; and the mongrel was about to pursue Alexander to that end, when gallant old Tom Twitter, acting with great presence of mind, flung himself, like a football tackle, on the little beast, and rose unscathed, with the now snarling dog by the scruff of the neck, held safely at arm's length. Such was the commotion, and with such violence did Tom Twitter precipitate himself, and so triumphantly did he arise, that the Little Girl was trembling and Master

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Eton Collar was transfixed with horror : a condition from which they did not recover until Tom Twitter had temporarily disposed of the dog and soothed their agitation.

"Oh, my," moaned the Little Girl ;
" what will become of the poor dog ? "

" The dog, my dear, " Tom Twitter replied, " will end his suffering in the chloroform box. "

Eton Collar reported at the Pasteur Institute for treatment the very next morning at eleven o'clock : for a *post mortem* had confirmed the correctness of Tom Twitter's diagnosis. And Eton Collar reported for treatment twice every day thereafter for eight days and once every day following for twenty-three days. And upon every occasion Eton Collar was punctured with a hypodermic needle in his tender little abdomen—punctured twice, once on the right side and once on the left (where it hurt very much more). And Eton Collar's abdomen turned black

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and blue and so sensitive that he hated even to think of its neighborhood ; and he was very sore, and sick, and sometimes feverish, and must have hot fomentations applied with regularity to ease the pain. And Eton Collar was denied cake, candy, pastry, ice-cream, and the like of that. And the only compensation Eton Collar had was that he was not allowed to go to school ; and the only satisfaction he got was the knowledge that for eight years to come he could without alarm be bitten just as much as he liked by mad dogs.

XIII

Whence the Little Girl



UST as it happens in stories, so, too, upon occasion, it happens in real life, as in the case of the Little Girl and her grandfather, that Persons of Refinement come to Poverty. Let Death lay hands upon Father and Mother—let Evil Fortune step in to finish the miserable business—and the Surviving Members of the Family may be transported, in a flash, as upon an evil magic carpet, from a Condition of Affluence to the Impecunious Circumstances of a Tenement Room.

During the month following Alexander's reception into the infirmary of the Twitter Academy for the Higher Education of Canines, in the course of which the Little Girl came often to discover the youngster's welfare and progress, Tom Twitter learned,

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putting this and that together from a stream of ingenuous chatter, that the Little Girl lived alone with her grandfather, in that mean neighbourhood. Tom Twitter learned, moreover, that the Little Girl's grandfather, a Veteran of the Civil War, not having been disabled in the course of those gallant services, had with much spirit refused a pension. Tom Twitter learned that the Little Girl's grandfather had lost his Job, but that, with conspicuous courage and hope, he was looking for another, meanwhile accomplishing what he could, in small ways, to "tide things over."

But Tom Twitter did not learn—for he knew it already—that Persons of Refinement are Particular; and from the first evening of the Little Girl's return to inquire for Alexander until the very day when that jovial canine should be graduated from the institution, Tom Twitter puzzled his wits to devise a plan of his own for "tiding over" the Little Girl's establishment, but without the least success whatsoever.

Whence the Little Girl

"How's Grandfather?" says Tom Twitter.

"He's well," the Little Girl invariably responded.

Not with much heart, though: for always the Little Girl sighed.

"Got that Job?" Tom Twitter demanded.

"Well, no," said the Little Girl; "but he's hoping, you know, of course."

"Lookin' 'round?"

"Oh, yes! Dear me! I should rather *think* so! He's looking. That's the trouble. He's *always* looking. I have to keep a very sharp eye on Grandfather, you know."

Well, now, of course, that was a very curious thing to say. Tom Twitter was bewildered. A curious thing to say, indeed: said in such a curious way, too—intimating so much of mystery and concern—that Tom Twitter's delicacy would not permit him to inquire concerning the real state of the case. But the canaries had no such delicacy. Their curiosity was

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unbounded and impudent. At least, it *seemed* to be unbounded ; and if it existed at all, it was surely impudent enough : for whenever the subject of the Little Girl's grandfather was approached, the canaries began to eavesdrop, without the least politeness whatsoever ; and when—as always happened—nothing of importance was disclosed, the canaries chirped their anger and impatience like the most ill-bred children you could possibly imagine.

Tom Twitter was curious, too. And you, had you been involved in the mystery, would not have been one whit more polite. What was the Veteran looking for ? Obviously, not for a Job. That time seemed to have gone by. And why, then, should he “look” at all ? And why was “looking” the “trouble” ? And why must the Little Girl “keep a very sharp eye” on Grandfather ? No wonder the canaries were curious. No wonder Tom Twitter was given to speculation of a benevolent sort. And no wonder that you, too, would like to know the contents of the simple mystery.

Whence the Little Girl

And then came an hour late in the afternoon of the day before Alexander's graduation. Tom Twitter could wait no longer. Alexander was about to depart. The Little Girl would return no more. Tom Twitter *must* know the situation. "Things" *must* be "tided over."

"Grandfather got that Job?" Tom Twitter demanded, desperately.

"Nope," said the Little Girl.

"Got an eye on a Job?"

"Nope."

"Lookin' for a Job?"

"Nope."

"Lookin' for *anything*?"

"Yep."

"In Heaven's name," Tom Twitter burst out, "what *is* he looking for?"

And now the canaries cocked their ears to listen.

"Well, you see," the Little Girl explained, "I'm afraid Grandfather will never *find* what he's looking for."

Heavens and earth, how angry the canaries were!

XIV

The Graduation of Alexander



VISITING DAY came along, to be sure—that Visiting Day which should witness the restored Alexander's public performance and graduation from the Twitter Academy for the Higher Education of Canines. And the morning of the day passed, and noon came, and two o'clock of the afternoon, and half-after-three; and at four o'clock to the minute the Little Girl arrived in a state of delicious trepidation at Tom Twitter's door. It was a clear day, blue and nippy and sunshiny; and there was a row of equipages drawn up at the curb, with coachmen and footmen and chauffeurs stamping about and swinging their arms and growling and gossiping. And within there was a vast excitement: old Tom Twitter in his glory, looking more like a robin than ever, in a tight cutaway

The Graduation of Alexander

coat with stiff tails, and tight breeches, and a very high collar, and a very bright cravat, and with a charming and indefatigable smile, and with a voice all chirps and twitters; and there was a round dozen of joyous little boys and girls, little fashionables, every one of them, with maids attached to some, and governesses to others, and a jovial tutor to one spectacled little rascal, and all laughing and chattering in free delight. And the schoolroom was in festal array: bunting and flowers; and there were comfortable audience chairs at one end, and a semicircle of velvet-covered pedestals at the other, upon which, groomed for the occasion, sat Tom Twitter's pupils, wagging and panting and grinning and squirming in the most excited fashion.

There, too, to be sure, in abounding good humour and good health, occupying a higher pedestal, in the middle of the semicircle, as if a seat of honour, sat Alexander. And midway of the exercises, in a speech of the neatest description, Tom Twitter, having first referred in compli-

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mentary terms to a young pupil of exemplary ambition and studious habits, called upon Alexander to illustrate, by means of a short performance, the truth of the excellent maxim that Proficiency is the Reward of Industry. It is true that in response to this invitation Alexander descended from the pedestal, it is true that he advanced to the middle of the floor, it is true that he squatted there, one ear up and one ear down, as if perfectly willing to begin and perfectly capable of indefinitely continuing ; but it must most unhappily be related that when Tom Twitter bade him execute the elementary exercise of sitting up, Alexander did nothing of the sort. It was stage-fright—neither more nor less. Alexander shivered, and grinned, and hung his head, and nervously lifted one little paw after the other, and looked about in pitiful and abject embarrassment. And Tom Twitter was embarrassed, too, and the Little Girl was so chagrined that she flushed like a peony in bloom ; and Bob Scotch—old Bob Scotch who had devoted



It was stage fright—neither more nor less

The Graduation of Alexander

a vast amount of labour to illustrating for Alexander's benefit every single command that Tom Twitter voiced in the weary process of tuition—poor old Bob Scotch was disgusted.

It was Bob Scotch, however, that saved the situation : for Bob Scotch, having slyly retired apart, but not beyond Alexander's cognizance, promptly and conspicuously sat up when Tom Twitter next commanded that evolution. And Alexander, his wits restored by this clandestine hint, immediately sat up, as if of his own notion ; and after that he had no difficulty whatsoever in covering himself with glory : for he not only assumed the posture of prayer, perambulated on the posterior extremities and fulfilled every other requirement of the course in Polite Deportment and Parlour Tricks, but with surprising ease and elegance performed a feat or two from the course in Advanced Acrobatics : which is to say that he stood on his head, rolled the globe about, leaped through the paper-covered hoop, turned a somersault in mid-

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air and walked about on his fore legs as if he had been born to that fashion of perambulation. It was a glorious triumph; and when it was all over—and when Tom Twitter had snapped his fingers to signify the conclusion—and in the midst of the cheers and hand-clapping—the accomplished Alexander bolted for the Little Girl and sprang right into her arms. And for a moment the Little Girl heard nothing of the applause—saw nothing of the smiling faces round about—her heart was thumping so hard with delight and her eyes were so blinded with grateful tears.

“And now, young gentlemen,” cried Tom Twitter, turning to the frisking semicircle of pupils, “the college yell!”

The college yell was uproariously accomplished—a splendid, stirring confusion of howls, yelps and growls. Never before, indeed, since those savage times in which the college yell originated, had a yell of such triumphant, defiant, altogether blood-curdling quality been uttered, as the college yell—or yelp (as you will)—of the

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Tom Twitter Academy for the Higher Education of Canines upon that occasion. Upon the last fearsome growl of it there followed the bustle and chatter of congratulatory leave-taking; and in the midst of this polite behaviour—while Tom Twitter and old Bob Scotch displayed the exquisite quality of their deportment at the schoolroom door—the Little Girl was all at once confronted by the master of the Blue Ribbon Pomeranian, which had conspicuously failed of even the most elementary success in the preliminary exercises. Master Eton Collar, his sturdy person polished from his toes to his cowlick, stood, now, genially scowling—a feat which the young gentleman actually accomplished—with his hands in his pockets, his fat legs spread, his black eyes sparkling in covetous regard of the talented Alexander.

“Give you five dollars for your dog,” said he.

The Little Girl regarded Master Eton Collar with as near an approach to scorn as her tender little heart would allow.

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"Thank you," said she, frigidly. "He isn't for sale."

"Give you six."

"No, thank you."

"Seven."

"But he isn't for sale."

"Give you ten."

"Stop!" cried the Little Girl. "You—you—*mustn't!*"

"Fifteen."

"Oh, *please* stop!" the Little Girl cried again, her eyes flooding with tears. "If you—if you—don't stop instantly—I'll—I'll *have* to sell him."

"Give you twenty," says Eton Collar, promptly.

"Oh, I can't!" the Little Girl moaned, knowing well enough that she must. Yes, she must. T-t-t-twenty d-d-dollars? Indeed, she must. And she kissed Alexander in frantic alarm and grief. "Oh, please go home!" she begged of the little boy. "Oh, please go 'way!" Tom Twitter then approaching, having shaken the hand of the last little patron, she ap-



"He wants to buy my dog!" she wailed

The Graduation of Alexander

pealed wildly to him. "He wants to buy my dog!" she wailed. "He—he—he has a dog of his own—and now he wants—he w-w-wants mine! He has everything—they all have everything—and they w-w-want m-m-more. Oh, I don't want him to have my dog! Oh—oh—I w-w-want to k-k-keep my own dog!" And then she began hopelessly to sob, choking out, "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" the while, in the most heartrending way.

"Twenty-five," said Eton Collar, unperturbed.

"Don't you take it!" cried the frenzied Tom Twitter.

"Twenty-five," Eton Collar repeated.

"No!" shouted Tom Twitter.

The Little Girl took heart from Tom Twitter's significant vehemence.

"I won't!" she screamed in a fury.

Eton Collar laughed.

"I want that pup, all right," said the sophisticated young jackanapes to Tom Twitter, "but I'll be darned if I'll be stung for him."

XV

Paul Pilligrumble Proposes



WHEN Master Eton Collar was gone his way in the tonneau of his motor-car—and when the curb was deserted of coachmen and footmen and sulky chauffeurs and equipages of every description—and when Tom Twitter's little shop had gratefully lapsed from its feverish attack of fashion to a normal condition of gentle twitters and chirps—and when Tom Twitter had soothed the Little Girl's sobs and had promised to ease her conscience in respect to the continued possession of Alexander—a most extraordinary coincidence occurred. As in stories, so, too, in real life, as in the case of the Little Girl and Alexander, coincidence frequently plays a beneficent part. And coincidence

Paul Pilligrumble Proposes

now came to the rescue ; the coincidence being this : that Paul Pilligrumble popped in ; which is to say, that Col. Paul Pilligrumble of Paul Pilligrumble's Performing Poodles providentially peregrinated within on two violently agitated posterior extremities. And this selfsame Paul Pilligrumble—a stout, rubicund individual, with a luxuriant, inky moustache, curling thrice at the ends in a very fierce fashion, his whole person inevitably suggesting the romantic corollary of a gold-braided red coat, a pair of glistening Wellington boots and a cracking whip—this selfsame Paul Pilligrumble was in possession of a preposterously pertinent proposition.

"Twitter," he gasped, in instant haste and need, not even waiting to catch his breath, "'ave you got a clever dawg 'ere I can 'ave for a week or two?"

"A poodle?"

"Don't care a 'ang w'at 'e is. My clown's ill. I want a dawg—any kind of a dawg—that can do a comedy turn."

"Pilligrumble," said Tom Twitter, beam-

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ing, "this is positively providential. I have the cleverest youngster ——"

"Dawg's engaged."

"But ——"

"Dawg's engaged."

"I say, Pilligrumble, the terms ——"

"'Ang the terms. Dawg's engaged, I tell you."

Tom Twitter turned to the Little Girl.

"My dear," said he, diffidently, "it is a remunerative opportunity. And Alexander is quite equal to it. Would you mind very much—would you—would you really mind very much—if Alexander should accept a temporary engagement on the vaudeville stage?"

"I think it would be a perfectly lovely experience for him!" replied the Little Girl, positively.

Later, when the Little Girl, having left a warm little kiss on old Tom Twitter's boyish cheek in sentient proof of thanks and everlasting friendship, and with such dear trustfulness that Tom Twitter's eyes twinkled



"Hang the terms! Dawg's engaged, I tell you!"

Paul Pilligrumble Proposes

more with established love than anything else—when the Little Girl, I say, was gone happily home with the first week's installment of Alexander's wages in her pocket, and was gone home, too, with the comfortable assurance in her grateful little heart that the talented and best beloved Alexander would keep the pot boiling until the Veteran fell into other employment; and when the lamps were trimmed, and the wind was about its melancholy business in the night, and the stove had been furiously shaken into a proper understanding of its duty; and when old Tom Twitter had read every word of his evening paper, greatly to his dissatisfaction with the political condition of both State and Nation, not to mention his disgust with a corrupt municipal administration; and when he had stood for a moment in the middle of the floor, his eyes flashing with jovial friendliness, his legs spread wide, his hands in his pockets, his head on one side, he went "*Tweet, tweet!*" with ingratiating sweetness, and at once the familiar place, which was already glow-

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ing with light and warmth, awoke to vociferous jubilation.

"*Tweet?*" inquired Mr. Twitter, archly, of the canaries.

"*Tweet, tweet, tweet!*" was the enthusiastic reply.

"*Tweet, tweet?*" Mr. Twitter insisted, to make sure.

There was a great storm of twitters and chirps in continued approval.

"*Tweet!*" Mr. Twitter delightedly agreed.

And I think so, too!

XVI

Tom Twitter Perturbed



WELL, now, this was all very well for the time being. Alexander's accomplishments in the comedy way would manage a period of security. Pilligrumble was a good fellow—an honest, kindly fellow. "Things" would be "tided over." But what then? What was to become of the Veteran? And what, then, was to become of the Little Girl? Tom Twitter, you see, clever as he had been, had achieved no permanent improvement in the fortunes of the Little Girl and the Veteran. As for the Veteran, Tom Twitter continued to know nothing whatsoever about *him*. The Veteran was a Shadow—living with a very little girl in a tenement room of the neighbourhood. He was Grandfather. He was Pretty Well To-day. And that was all.

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Tom Twitter was of a far too delicate turn to exercise his curiosity again in respect to the Little Girl's business ; and the Little Girl was far too considerate—and far too sensible, too, in her own wise little way—and far too much of a courageous little gentlewoman—to intrude her difficulties upon a friendship so generous and completely delightful. And so for a space—for two weeks and three days, to be precise—Alexander “tided things over” by publicly performing his exercises, twice daily, to the huge satisfaction of Paul Pilligrumble of Pilligrumble's Performing Poodles. Alexander, in short, in the vernacular of that curious circle to which adverse circumstances had introduced him, “brought home the bacon.” At the end of that time it appeared that Paul Pilligrumble's clown would presently be able to resume his activities. And that meant, of course, that Alexander would presently lose his job. And then, all at once, coincidence, which plays its part in real life you must know, as well as in those fanci-



Tom Twitter Perturbed

ful tales which men invent for gain, took a hand in the affairs of Alexander, the Veteran, Tom Twitter and the Little Girl, precisely as if they were characters in a story, and greatly favoured by the wise writer.

It was nine o'clock of a windy night. Had it been half after it wouldn't have mattered at all. It chanced, however, to be nine o'clock. And it was nine o'clock of that very night when the faithful Alexander was to be released from his remunerative engagement with Paul Pilligrumble's Performing Poodles. Paul Pilligrumble had given notice. Paul Pilligrumble had reluctantly given notice. Paul Pilligrumble made no secret of his reluctance. Paul Pilligrumble said that Alexander was a promising young performer—a clever, industrious young chap, with a genius for the profession. But Paul Pilligrumble had given notice just the same. And here it was nine o'clock of a most perplexing period—nine o'clock of a bitter night, with snow in the wind, disporting gently enough in the sheltered

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cross-streets, but blustering thickly down the lighted avenues. The rich must wrap themselves up to keep warm ; and the poor, God help them ! must make the best of the weather, with such cheerful faces as they could command. Blow ? It blew great guns—great guns from the north—in an old-fashioned wintry way ; and as for snow, never before, I am sure, had there been such a joyous cloud and swirl in the town. Nine o'clock : and nine o'clock was precisely the hour when Tom Twitter was accustomed to return to the canaries in the Bird-Store from a turn of exercise in the streets of the neighbourhood—chest out and breath drawn deep. And Tom Twitter was returning.

A steeple blithely chimed a warning of the impending hour to the streets below, and, after a decent interval of grace to the unwary, gravely struck it off : *Dong !—dong !—dong !* There was no pause ; there was no relenting : *Dong !—dong !—dong !* Another hour was sped, no doubt about it ; high above the streets the steeple

Tom Twitter Perturbed

continued the solemn proclamation to an end: *Dong!* — *dong!* — DONG! Nine o'clock! The rollicking wind caught the last stroke of the bell and swooped with it to the streets; and having sharpened the steps of the passengers of the snowy night, and having warned wastrels that the hours of grace were flying, and having proclaimed bedtime to little children, and having practiced with an infinite variety of purpose upon the hearts of all people, the wind whisked the trembling news of the hour to that mean quarter of the town where old Tom Twitter walked for exercise — chest out, cheeks rosy, breath deep drawn, and lean, long legs thoroughly stretching themselves.

Tom Twitter pulled out his watch and promptly congratulated the steeple upon its accustomed punctuality.

Then —

“Nine o'clock,” thought he. “I ought to be at the corner. Haven’t missed being at the corner at nine o'clock in a month.”

It was a curious thing, indeed.

XVII

In Flight



OM TWITTER was about to move off upon his business (which was to get home to the canaries with all the haste he could command)—Tom Twitter was about to button his top-coat and pull down his cap—Tom Twitter was about to throw out his chest again and lift his glowing face to the wind—Tom Twitter was about to breast the gale with delight in the boisterous quality of the night—Tom Twitter was about to step forth with some recollection of youth in his long legs and a big breath of the frosty air tingling in his capable lungs. But in the very act of assuming this defiant attitude he was arrested by the amazing behaviour of a

In Flight

distinguished-appearing individual who at that fateful moment emerged from a dark by-street into a blast of white wind that nearly toppled him over.

Tom Twitter skipped—hopped, I should say—into the seclusion of a cloud of snow.

“It is evident,” thought he, “that I have encountered a singular experience.”

It turned out that he had.

“Well,” thought he, presently, quite baffled, “this is really too much for *me!*”

A very old man this was, it seemed: an incredibly old man, as the lamp revealed him, white with years and some hard service—an old, old man, staff in hand, with a hooked nose and deep-sunk eyes, with long white hair and a long white beard and bushy white eyebrows. Tom Twitter fancied he had never before been privileged to behold the beauty of age—a countenance of this patriarchal sweetness and strength and nobility. The old fellow was clad in a long blue coat, with a big fur cap pulled down over his ears, his hands in thick red mittens; and what with the

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cut and colour of the coat, and what with the glint of brass buttons and the upright bearing of the man, Tom Twitter immediately put him down for an old soldier, which, indeed, was a very good guess. He was now so suspiciously engaged, however, that one must think twice: the uniform and gentle aspect of the Veteran were in no agreement whatsoever with his sinister behaviour.

“A sneak-thief? Nonsense!” thought Tom Twitter, indignant with himself.

Surely not a sneak-thief!

“Simply *couldn't* be,” thinks Tom.

And yet —

“A fugitive?” mused Tom.

A fugitive! That was it! The old gentleman was a fugitive. It was as plain as day. He glanced this way and that. He was timid and alert. He was in fear of pursuit and capture.

“I wonder,” thought Tom Twitter, almost laughing outright, “what in the world the old gentleman is running away from?”

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The disposition to laugh sprang from no thoughtless regard, you may believe, but from an overwhelming amazement; and it instantly vanished from Tom Twitter's kindly heart. There was no occasion of amusement: the Veteran was on his last legs, which trembled and wobbled and seemed to be on the very point of buckling beneath him; and whatever plenitude of spirit he still possessed, his breath at least was near gone. He stared this way and that in vast agitation—and he peeped into the shadows—and with a hand sheltering his eyes from the driving snow he looked all round/about—and he peered over his shoulder, cringing, like a man in deadly fear—and he made off to the north, but at once returned, on a ramshackle little run, and made to the east—then in abortive little rushes to the west and south. Presently he stood exhausted and irresolute under the street lamp; but having at last, and evidently to his satisfaction, discovered himself alone, and having determined upon the direction he should take, he tiptoed

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stealthily off on the wind, as best he could with the help of his staff.

Tom Twitter made haste in pursuit and tapped the fugitive on the shoulder from behind.

“I beg your pardon, sir——” he began.

The Veteran stopped dead still and shivered.

“I say, you know,” Tom Twitter went on, in the most reassuring voice he could command; “if I can be of any use to——”

The Veteran flashed about in a rush of anger—in fright, perhaps; who could tell?—and in a snarling defiance—and with such a start, and so swiftly, that Tom Twitter bounded back in astonishment. For a moment the Veteran stood drawn upright, at bay, his head at a belligerent thrust (which was quite absurd), and his staff lifted in something of the manner of a fencing-master; but no sooner had he fairly clapped eyes on Tom Twitter than every indication of fear and rage instantly vanished and his countenance assumed an expression of amazed and tender delight.

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With both red-mittened hands extended—trembling, too, because of age and exhaustion and the pulse of his emotion—but with his blue eyes joyously alight with recognition—and with a smile such as only those taught of age and the labour of years can accomplish in sweetness and sincerity—he advanced, tottering eagerly against the wind, too feeble to breast it, but yet doughtily labouring, in haste to clasp hands.

Tom Twitter felt that the Veteran had the advantage of him. No : Tom Twitter had never before clapped eyes on the Veteran.

“Positively don’t know him,” he thought, with regret.

Yet here was the Veteran advancing—his hand out and his fine old face alight with joyous and affectionate recognition.

XVIII

The Questing Veteran



OM TWITTER felt like heartily opening his arms — like ejaculating, "Well, well, old comrade!" as though he had known the Veteran all these years since the times of camps and battles. Fortunately, however, he was not put to this sorry pretense. The Veteran stopped midway in the wind; and he scratched his long nose, and he shrugged his shoulders, and he brushed the misunderstanding from his eyes.

"I beg your pardon," said he. "I—I—I have made a mistake."

A courageous little smile—which was no real smile at all—revealed to Tom Twitter the immensity of the Veteran's disappointment. Whatever he might have

The Questing Veteran

said in polite reply stuck in his throat; he could do nothing but bow.

"My eyes," the Veteran gasped in apology, "are not what they used to be. I am a very old man, sir—I am an old, old man."

Tom Twitter bowed again.

"I am exceedingly sorry to have troubled you, sir," said the Veteran.

"No trouble at all!" Tom Twitter protested.

"I am looking," the Veteran disclosed, "for—somebody."

"If I could be of any assistance," Tom Twitter began, "I'm sure I should be delighted to——"

"Ever know a man named Stoneman?"

"Stoneman? No."

"William E. Stoneman?"

"Never heard of him."

"Limpy Stoneman?"

"Limpy?"

"Yes. We used to call him Limpy. Maybe he goes by that name yet. I reckon you never heard of him?"

The Bird-Store Man

Tom Twitter shook his head.

"Well," says the Questing Veteran, "I'd like almighty well to get a grip of Limpy Stoneman's hand. You see," he went on, "it's this way. The boys are dying off fast nowadays. Nobody left of my command but me. That is, there's nobody left that anybody knows about. But I reckon there's a few of the boys still hanging on. Lost track of, you know. Not on the roll. Marked off as missing. And I reckon that if I keep on looking I'll run across one of 'em. Now, it would be pretty hard to kill Limpy Stoneman. I reckon Limpy Stoneman is alive at this minute. I reckon if I find any of the boys it will be Limpy. Anyhow, I'll keep on—looking for some of the boys. They're not all dead but me. Why—they *can't* be all dead but me." The Questing Veteran put a hand on Tom Twitter's arm and looked deep into Tom Twitter's eyes. "You wouldn't say, would you," he asked, "that all the boys are dead but me? It couldn't be true! It just *couldn't*!"

The Questing Veteran

By this time Tom Twitter's surmise that the Questing Veteran was abroad without the knowledge of some friendly guardian had become a certainty.

"May I ask you, sir," he inquired, "if your friends at home are not searching for you in some anxiety?"

"For what?" gasped the Questing Veteran.

"For you."

"Me?"

"Yes, sir!"

The Questing Veteran took to his heels. After a horrified glance at Tom Twitter he looked swiftly up and down the avenue and along the cross-street and fled in a panic. A long step—the skip of a game leg—and a tap of the staff! Off he rattled, swaying down the wind. Step, skip, and tap! It was desperate progress. And with reason, perhaps—who could tell? or quite without it—who could tell? for though shadowy figures, doubled up and striving in the gale, had come and gone near by, nothing in the least menacing

The Bird-Store Man

had appeared until now : a little girl (whom Tom Twitter did not recognize), far off in the snow, hastening, wind-blown and impeded, but struggling with significant anxiety. And step, skip, and tap ! went the Questing Veteran down the wind, employing his inadequate legs as if the police were upon him ; and in chase bounded Tom Twitter, the very instant he had recovered from his amazement, and presently overtook the Questing Veteran, and touched his labouring shoulder.

“ One moment ! ” he began. “ Let me ex —— ”

Again—and precisely in the same manner as before—the Questing Veteran turned upon him. He was more exhausted, but the defiance was as spirited as it had been, you may be sure ; there was the same belligerent thrust to the old man’s head, the same high flash of the eye, the same courageous lifting of the staff, the same blithe and thoroughgoing will for combat. No sooner, however, had the Questing Veteran fairly clapped eyes

The Questing Veteran

on Tom Twitter than the singular incident continued to repeat itself. Seeming quite to have forgotten the former encounter, he advanced with outstretched hands. There was the same feeble eagerness—the same wrestle with the wind—the same dawning smile of recognition, incredulous, fleeting, but yet returning with high certainty—and the same collapse to uttermost disappointment and chagrin, borne with much polite fortitude.

“I beg your pardon,” he gasped, with a little smile. “I—I—I have made a mistake.”

“Don’t mention it!” said Tom Twitter.

“I’m sorry, sir. I really beg your pardon. Very awkward for you, sir, I’m sure.”

“Not at all, sir—not at all!”

“You see, sir,” the Questing Veteran wheezed, “I am an old man. I am a very old man.”

Tom Twitter bowed.

“My eyes,” said the Questing Veteran, “are not what they used to be.”

The Bird-Store Man

Again Tom Twitter bowed.

"Never happened to fall in with a chap named Stoneman, did you?" the Questing Veteran inquired.

"Never, sir."

"Bill Stoneman?"

Tom Twitter shook his head.

"William E. Stoneman?"

"No, sir."

"Limpy Stoneman? We called him Limpy. An intimate form. Probably he goes by that name yet. Never happened to ——"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Tom Twitter.

"Ah, well," the Questing Veteran sighed, "I'll fall in with some of the boys one of these days. They'll be glad to see me. Good-night, sir."

Tom Twitter bowed, with all the politeness he could command. The Questing Veteran bowed with equal courtesy. They bowed together—and each separately. Never before had the degree and quantity of politeness been exhibited on *that* street corner! Had the lamp-post been possessed

The Questing Veteran

of any feeling whatsoever, it would have bowed, too ; but it stood stiff as ever, yielding neither to the wind nor to the obvious demands of the situation, while the Questing Veteran and Tom Twitter saluted in the military fashion, and the Questing Veteran staggered away into the windy shadows of the cross-street, which instantly swallowed him up.

XIX

To the Rescue



HEAVEN only knows how long Tom Twitter might have stood stock-still in the blizzard like a lamp-post ! Heaven only knows how many critical moments he might have wasted stupidly staring into the whirling darkness wherein the Questing Veteran had vanished ! Heaven only knows how long he might in his abstraction have neglected the duty of following to preserve the old man against the many chances of the night !—had not his amazement been interrupted by a shout from up the street :

“Catch him ! Catch him !”

Of course, Tom Twitter, being a person of sound mind, and of a deal of common sense, when he cared to employ it, knew well enough that the Questing Veteran

To the Rescue

had not yet gone beyond relief and recovery. Tom Twitter knew very well that a determined expedition could surely discover and rescue the Questing Veteran. Tom Twitter knew, too, that the little girl, who had shouted so lustily, and was now coming down the street in the grip of a gust of wind, and whom he did not, even as yet, recognize—Tom Twitter divined and knew very well that this selfsame little girl possessed authority over the Questing Veteran and could persuade him to return to the place and duty from which he had absconded. And so Tom Twitter waited with his arms spread wide to grapple the little girl and wrest her from the gust of wind.

“You!” cried Tom Twitter, when he had the Little Girl close held in his arms.

“You!” cried the Little Girl.

“Certainly!” said Tom Twitter. “Certainly!”

“Where’s he gone?” gasped the Little Girl.

“Who?”

“The Major.”

The Bird-Store Man

"What Major?"

"Grandfather. He's running away."

"Running away!" Tom Twitter exclaimed. "What for?"

"He often runs away."

"Looking for the boys?"

"Yes."

"Well, well!"

"Hurry!" urged the Little Girl.

"This way!" shouted Tom Twitter.

Off they ran in chase of the Questing Veteran.

And when they found him at last, the Questing Veteran was in hard case. He had gone far beyond his power. They found him sitting on the stoop of some dark-windowed house. There was no wind blowing in the sheltered street; but snow was falling thickly, and presently he would have been covered up. It seemed that all strength for the quest had left him. From time to time he mumbled with spirit to some ghostly shadows in the snow; but he was very tired, and he was glad to be found.

XX

A Friend of the Aged



T was not a gaunt and many-windowed tenement of some swarming neighbourhood to which Tom Twitter presently came with the Little Girl and the Questing Veteran. It was to an ancient brownstone dwelling of a quiet street—tenanted by many families, to be sure, but still preserving much of its grace and dignity. The hall was bare, the stair was bare, the walls were blank and cracked : it was everywhere dusty and dim. A lively hum came from behind the closed doors, however ; and Tom Twitter fancied that though the old house had long ago been abandoned by Fashion and given over to the poor, it was still engaged in sheltering gentle and happy hearts.

The Bird-Store Man

And there, in the rooms they occupied, third-floor rear, was Alexander, on his haunches before the fire, in a disconsolately limp attitude, which one lifted ear somewhat relieved. Obviously, Paul Pilligrumble had brought him home in the interim of the Little Girl's absence. It was Saturday night. Alexander's engagement was terminated. He had lost his job. Through no fault of his own, to be sure : yet he wore the shamed air—or seemed to wear it—of one out of employment ; and it was not in the least difficult to suppose that his dejection indicated disgust with a world which would not continuously reward Genius and Industry with Opportunity to Provide for the Family. However, the Little Girl knew very well that Alexander had done the best that he could ; and instead of adding to his dejection, as some housewives might have done, she dashed at him, in a rapture, and caught him up, and squeezed him, and kissed him, in no uncertain way, on the tip of his cold little nose.

A Friend of the Aged

"Well," says she, "I'm glad *you're* home again, anyhow!"

Alexander cheered up.

Instantly the Little Girl began a motherly bustle in behalf of the Questing Veteran, clucking and fluttering all the while like a much-perturbed hen; and this very proper behaviour Alexander observed—or seemed to observe—with every indication of satisfaction, as though, having come in from the windy night himself, he knew precisely what should be done in such cases. The Little Girl whisked off the Questing Veteran's cap, and pulled off his coat, and jerked off his shoes; and she snuggled him in a great red chair by the fire (there were fireplaces in the old house), which she had meantime poked to a welcoming blaze.

The Questing Veteran promptly fell asleep.

"You don't mind, do you?" asked the Little Girl.

"Not at all," replied Tom Twitter, "not in the least, I assure you."

The Bird-Store Man

"He ought to be in bed," said the Little Girl. "Don't you think so?"

Tom Twitter glanced at the Veteran's ghastly face.

"True," said he. "I should advise it."

"Time for bed!" called the Little Girl.

The Questing Veteran opened his eyes in a bewildered stare.

"My dear?" said he, smiling.

"Off you go, grandfather."

And the Questing Veteran went away to his room, having first kissed the Little Girl good-night and bowed to Tom Twitter. It seemed that he was very glad to go—because he was tired and sleepy. The Little Girl could not rest until she had discovered that he was safely stowed away.

It grew late at last—too late for the Little Girl to be out of bed: even too late for Tom Twitter (whose canaries would think him lost for good and all) to be so far away from home. Alexander was curled up and sound asleep: lifting his

A Friend of the Aged

head, once in a while, as though to listen for some sound which no human ear could catch. No stirring or breath came from the Questing Veteran's room. Far down town, the punctual steeple had blithely chimed its warning, and gravely struck the hour, more than once since the rollicking old wind arrested Tom Twitter on the street corner where the Questing Veteran was bewildered and lost. The lamp was low: the fire glowed warm. Tom Twitter, fallen into a dream, had the wistful Little Girl on his knee. And they had said never a word to each other for a long, long time, but had continued content with the warmth of the room, and the glow of the fire, and the contrast of the howling wind outside, and each with the comfortable presence of the other. But by and by, with reluctance, Tom Twitter said that he must now be off to his own place. It was very late (said he); and all little girls should be in bed, lest their cheeks glow no more, and their eyes lose glory. And the Little Girl snuggled closer—snuggled close and hard—so

The Bird-Store Man

that Tom Twitter could not rise ; and she clutched his hand, saying, " No, no—oh, please don't ! "

Tom Twitter would not deny himself the delight of this loving companionship.

It grew very late.

Later still.

Midnight.

" What's that ? " the Little Girl whispered, starting up in fright.

Alexander growled.

" I heard nothing," said Tom Twitter.

The Little Girl was trembling.

" Listen ! " she gasped, slipping from Tom Twitter's knee.

Tom Twitter cocked his ear.

" Nothing," said he.

Alexander whimpered mournfully.

" In grandfather's room ! " the Little Girl gasped. " Don't you hear ? "

Tom Twitter hearkened.

" *There's somebody in there !* " the Little Girl whispered.

Tom Twitter heard a voice.

Did he hear voices ?

A Friend of the Aged

"I'm afraid!" sobbed the Little Girl.

Tom Twitter put his arms about the Little Girl and found her shaking from head to foot.

"It is nothing at all," said he. "Don't be afraid."

They listened again.

"There!" she wailed.

Tom Twitter heard it again—a voice or voices. A voice, no doubt. But not the Questing Veteran's voice. It was younger, stronger, more hearty—a fine jovial tone. But yet it *was* the Questing Veteran's voice. Whose else?

"They've got in," the Little Girl gasped.

"Who?"

"The boys."

"Hush!" said Tom Twitter.

Tom Twitter tiptoed to the Questing Veteran's door. Alexander, with bristling hair, was at his heels. Tom Twitter listened. It was war talk he heard—camp and battles. The Questing Veteran laughed. He coughed. He chuckled. He coughed again. He sighed. He was

The Bird-Store Man

still. Tom Twitter pushed the door ajar and softly entered. He was in anxious haste. But there was no need of haste. It was quite still in the room then. There was not so much as a breath to stir the silence. Tom Twitter presently tiptoed out. He went gravely to where the Little Girl stood waiting and wide-eyed.

"Is it William E. Stoneman?" she whispered.

"No," said Tom Twitter.

"I'm sorry," said she. "It was William E. Stoneman he wanted most of all."

"A better friend than William E. Stoneman."

"A better friend?"

Tom Twitter waited until alarm and grief possessed her—until she stood before him trembling. She leaped back from him, all at once—and shivered—and ran towards the Questing Veteran's room—and paused—and retreated from the door—and looked helplessly about the little room.

"Who is it?" she faltered.

A Friend of the Aged

"A friend of the aged," Tom Twitter answered, gently, "called by the name of Death."

"Oh, poor grandfather!" she cried.

"Child!" whispered Tom Twitter.

Tom Twitter's arms were open. The Little Girl flung herself into them. And there, for a long, long time, she lay sobbing.

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the poor, and to possess a canine of at least moderate genius, and to be ambitious for the canine you possess, I should most heartily advise you to look up Tom Twitter and see what comes of it. You will find Tom Twitter in the shop—as much like a gigantic robin as ever. And you will find the Little Girl there (when she is not employed in the pursuit of the Higher Education for Young Ladies)—growing in every way more adorable in a most amazing fashion. And you will find Bob Scotch there—a Professor Emeritus, now, and quite content with his lot, which is more than can be said for every Professor Emeritus. And you will find Alexander there—a diligent and astonishingly successful Head Master.

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